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ABSTRACT

The changing nature of the workplace is increasing recognition of the fact that employee career development is a lifelong process essential to the achievement and maintenance of a high-quality, competitive work force. Offering employees the opportunity to participate in growth and development programs that include career counseling, assessment, and planning components will enable them to maximize their potential within a company and take advantage of the opportunities available to them. The National Career Development Guidelines developed by the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee in 1990 are excellent sources for business and industry human resource development specialists seeking to devise a career development approach for adults. Successful strategies for implementing employee career development programs include the following: employee career center; career information seminars; career development workshops; individual career counseling/coaching; self-help materials; and computerized career systems. Many companies use professional resources such as Job Training Partnership Act programs, vocational centers, community colleges, or state employment service offices. The following are among the components of successful employee career programs: outreach campaign; initial employee consultation; informal assessments; procedures for interpreting and communicating assessment results; career exploration; career decision making; career action plan development; referrals and support; and program marketing. (MN)

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Discovering The Possibilities Of Career Counselling In Business And Industry

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Not long ago, we thought of the workplace as fairly stable. The emergence of global markets, accelerated technological influence, an aging workforce, and the industrial shift from goods production to service are but a few of the powerful forces impacting the stability of today's workplace.

There is an increasing recognition that individuals will be confronted with career transition more frequently than in the past. Skill obsolescence is on the rise, and workers must be prepared to face the challenges of continued change. Changes in the workplace require that both employers and employees think of career decision making in new ways and understand that career development is a lifelong process in which planning is essential.

Employee growth and development programs provide a vehicle through which a high-quality workforce can be achieved and maintained. These programs facilitate employee acquisition of skills that ease transitions caused by job changes, new workplace requirements, and changing life situations. Through participation in career growth and development programs, employees have access to career counselling, assessment, and planning so that they maximize their potential within a company and take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Career development programs can also assist displaced homemakers, those in employment training, and dislocated workers with employability and career transition skills.

Adult career development decisions and transitions are usually complex because of such things as family considerations, previous paid and/or non-paid work experience, related skills development, and changes or growth in both interests and values. With this in mind, a career program for adults should address the process adult clients need to experience their own career development, to realize the need for career decisions, and to understand the issues and concerns to be faced as career decisions are made. Often adult clients may need to address the complexities of impending career change while still in a workplace setting. In other instances, they may need to address the realities of changing state and local labor market information.

Because the indications are that career transitions for adults may be a growing pattern within our labor market, an employee career development program is both timely and adaptable for a variety of workplace and institutional environments. Some examples of potential settings are as follows:

1 Vocational centers or community colleges may offer a workshop for employees of private businesses or industries within their service area in cooperation with business or industry. The community college may also offer the workshops in cooperation with public sector agencies and for their adult clients within the community college service area.

2. State employment security agencies and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) client service centers may offer employee career development workshops to their clients who are displaced or soon to be displaced from employment.

3. Business and industry human resource development specialists may offer career workshops to their employees as a benefit of employment and as an effort to improve productivity.

The basis for a career development approach for adults should be based on a set of guidelines or competencies to serve as quality guides to assist trainers in the activities. The National Career Development Guidelines developed by NOICC (1990) are excellent sources for this purpose. NOICC also developed an excellent program called Employee Career Development (ECD)(1994) upon which a delivery process to employees could be based.

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STRATEGIES FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Although employee career development programs are found in numerous settings and types of organizations, they all deal with adults who are in some sort of career transition. These adults face a variety of challenges and might need help in any of several areas including self image and self-awareness, knowledge of occupational and educational options, decision making, and implementation plans.

In general, the adults participating in employee career development programs are seeking answers to questions that deal with their work life. The most effective employee career development programs will offer easy and efficient access to participants by using an array of methods, techniques, and resources. The following ways of implementing an employee career program are some of the more successful strategies.

1. Employee Career Center—serves as a focal point for the various methods used to implement career development. It is more than a physical location it must contain people, activities, materials, and resources.
2. Career Information Seminars—typically 1-2 hours in length focusing on stress management, financial planning, and career success skills. Short seminars are also used to inform employees of other career development services.
3. Career Development Workshops—uses a four-step process of assessment, career exploration, career decision making, and career planning.
4. Individual Career Counselling/Coaching—used to supplement group workshops to deal with those who have personal needs and request additional help or support.
5. Self-Help Materials workbooks, audiotapes, videos and specific company information on career pathways, job requirements and personnel policies.
6. Computerized Career Systems—used to explore salary, supply and demand, outlook, and state specific career information.

DELIVERY OF EMPLOYEE CAREER PROGRAMS

Just as there are a variety of methods for providing employee career programs, several kinds of human resources can be used to deliver the programs. In business organizations, employee career programs are often designed and coordinated through human resources development or personnel departments.

Many companies make good use of professional resources such as JTPA, vocational centers, community colleges, or state employment service offices. The counselling staff from these institutions can be contracted to develop and deliver employee career workshops for the company. Such networking and use of existing counsellor resources result in organizations reaching more employees in a well-ordered and cost effective manner.

Many organizations also rely upon supervisors and managers to perform the duties of career coach to their staff. This is a viable alternative because supervisors and managers are in an ideal position to support and advise employees. Training is essential before an organization embarks upon this approach.

Successful employee career development programs are multifaceted, based on the needs of both the employees and the organization. They draw on a variety of people's resources whose efforts must be coordinated and who must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of employee career development.

GETTING STARTED

Most organizations embarking on an employee career program prefer to offer some sort of employee or

client orientation. This orientation might be provided through group sessions or through individual meetings with a counsellor or a representative of the human resources development department. Orientation is a critical phase of an employee career development program and must be designed with the needs of the potential participants in mind. Employees will need information about the program and their part in it. For example, employees may want to know:

1.What is an employee career development program?
2. What is career development?
3. Who may participate?
4.When will the program take place and for how long? On my time or the company's time?
5. Where will the program be held?
6. How will the program operate -what is the process?
7. Why is the program being offered? Is there going to be a layoff? Is this an outplacement program or part of a "hiring from within" policy?

The orientation must be carefully planned and should involve representatives from the organization's various management and leadership levels because they are essential to the program's success and instrumental in helping frame the responses to many of the employee's questions. Confidentiality must be addressed as will the issue of voluntary or mandatory attendance. No matter what the parameters of the program, they must be clearly described to the participants at the outset of the program.

OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

A well-designed campaign is necessary to attract employees to an orientation. A variety of methods should be used to get the word out. Depending upon the resources available and the employee group targeted, a combination of the following should be used:

- People mangers, supervisors, union stewards
- Flyers—inserts in paychecks, intra-office mail
- Public announcements—newsletters, intercom
- Bulletin boards—departmental, personnel area, cafeteria, near time clocks or vending machines, electronic bulletin boards
- Electronic mail

Whatever method is used, the message must be clear and consistent, complete and accurate. The benefits of the program and reasons for the employee to attend the orientation should be stressed. For instance, some organizations require employees to have a written career plan before they are eligible to take advantage of prepaid tuition or tuition reimbursement plans. Anticipate questions and provide initial answers to the employees immediately during the orientation. This is especially important if the program is being offered due to an impending layoff.

ORIENTATION CONTENT AND DELIVERY

The amount of time set aside for employee orientation sessions will vary. Some orientations will be very short, while others may last more than two hours. It is most common for orientations to last approximately one hour. In any case, an opportunity to discuss employee concerns and expectations should be provided.

Following an open discussion, participants are more likely to be more receptive and attentive to the program information presented.

A typical career development orientation program might include:

- Introductions/ice -breaker

- Client expectations, concerns (small group activity)
- Purpose, goals of the program
- Benefits to the employees
- Overview of services, resources, process
- Policies regarding attendance, confidentiality, etc.
- Time frame, location
- Questions and answers
- Next steps—sign up

INITIAL EMPLOYEE/CLIENT CONSULTATION

As with the orientation session, the initial consultation can be pivotal to an employee's acceptance and willingness to take advantage of the career development program being offered. While the primary purpose of the initial consultation is to explain the program's purpose and to establish rapport with the employee, it is important that the counsellor gather some basic information about the employee that will help the employee in assessment and career planning. In addition to demographic information and permission to access educational and employment records, the counsellor should obtain information about personal and work-related needs and expectations. The employee's expectations can be solicited through questions asked during a description of the program purpose and services.
five categories:

1. Aptitude and ability tests
2. Interest inventories
3. Values assessments
4. Career development assessments
5. Personality or management style inventories

Aptitude and ability tests attempt to measure a person's overall ability including general intelligence. achievement, aptitude, and reading ability. In appraising adult career capabilities, it is particularly important that intelligence and aptitude tests have evidence of vocational validity.

Interest inventories help individuals identify their preferences for a particular activity. Suggestions are then made regarding the occupation or occupational clusters that most closely match their interests, and should be explored.

Values assessments assists individuals in identifying priorities, and it encompasses any activity that promotes self-examination. Values serve as guides to behavior and a basis for planning. Values are indicated in goals, attitudes, interests, feelings, activ es, behavior, and even in problems. Relating values to work decisions and choices helps employees determine their reasons for wanting to work, the characteristics of occupations that are appealing to them, and their career goals.

Career development instruments attempt to assess where a person may be in the career decision making/development process, predisposition towards career change, and other factors that affect the career development process.

Personality/Management Style inventories assess the emotional, social, and motivational aspects of an individual. These should be used only when the instrument has vocational validity for the employee/client.

INFORMAL ASSESSMENTS

Informal assessment involves gathering information from observations, reports from instructors and supervisors, school and work records, personal interviews, conferences, and computer programs. These assessment methods provide the counsellor with information about the employee's current interests, attitudes, and feelings—all of which have a bearing on employability and promotability. When coupled

with formal career assessment instruments, an employee's career profile begins to emerge.

INTERPRETING AND COMMUNICATING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Once an initial assessment has been administered, counsellors must decide how information and data collected from each method of assessment will be analyzed and communicated to the employee/client.

The interpretation of test scores begins with understanding the basic characteristics of the test selected and administered. Communication consists of reporting data so that it is understandable, informative, and useful. Consideration should be given to the employee's need for the information and to the purposes for evaluating the significance of that information for career and educational planning. Discussion with employees should focus on the meaning of the test results as they relate to the employee's future goals and the employee should be cautioned against relying solely on test scores to make possible training related decisions. The counsellor should encourage the employee/client to consider other relevant information about personal and social skills, values, interests, accomplishments, experiences, and other test scores and observations in developing his or her plans.

Remember, assessment is part of the process leading to self awareness. It relies on the active participation of the employee. It is something in which the counsellor acts as a facilitator and assists the employee to make sense of the data that will be used in the goal-setting process.

Also, the employee should be informed regarding who, if anyone, will have access to the results and safeguards which are in place to prevent abuse. Confidentiality is essential in all dealings with the employees/clients in the program, including assessment. It may be to the employee's advantage to share assessment results as part of the career plan with his or her supervisor/manager, but the employee must make that decision. This would not apply if the sharing of the assessment results with the organization was a designed as part of the program and was understood to be a part of the career development process within the organization.

CAREER EXPLORATION

The career exploration process involves linking self-knowledge with information gathering through the use of career information resources. The career resources can be accessed through a career resource center or library. The resources should be available in print, audiovisual, computer based, or from competent resource people.

CAREER DECISION MAKING

The career decision making process involves examining all the information gathered from the assessments, the career exploration processes, and by identifying some strategies for decision making. Such strategies might include identifying willingness to take risks, planful decision making, evaluating alternatives, and deciding which career is best for the employee.

CAREER ACTION PLAN

The development of the career action plan involves goal setting, identifying paths and obstacles in reaching the goal, analysis of the forces helping them reach the goal and those forces opposing the goal, and identifying steps to reach the career goal.

REFERRALS AND SUPPORT

Referrals put clients/employees into contact with organizations or agencies that will assist them in needed support services. Referrals help remove barriers to effective employment and career development. For effective referrals, counsellors or career coaches should:

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- Analyze the client's stated goals and needs.
- Match he client's needs to available support services.
- Consider corporate or organizational policies and goals when making referrals.
- Become familiar with agencies and organizations offering support services.
- Give clients a written referral that enables them to access the support services.

Many adults entering into a new aspect of employment, situational life changes, or substance abuse may need additional support services. Counsellors and career coaches, therefore, need to be aware of reliable and valid resources, how to access those services, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the referral.

MARKETING EMPLOYEE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

When organizations decide to implement an employee career development program they are usually looking for solutions organizational problems. These problems may include productivity, retention, job placement, technological change, and downsizing.

Before starting to market an employee career development program to business and industry, it is important to ask:

1.Who are the potential participants?
2.What do they, as clients, need and want?
3.Who is the potential organizational sponsor (industry, education, government)?
4.What does the sponsor need or want and when?
5.Based on these answers, what do you want to accomplish?
6.What is the best format to deliver the program?

Marketing an employee career development program requires a two pronged approach. Strategies must target both management and potential workshop participants. The management of a business organization, educational institution, or government organization will have to recognize the value of career development to its employees. In developing marketing strategies consider the following:

What Management Wants To Know

1. What benefit can an employee career program bring to the organization? Can it increase productivity, improve retention, and assist with upgrading skills or outplacement counselling as a result of downsizing? What solutions will it provide to what problems?
2. Can the organization assume the entire cost of the program ?
3. Is it feasible to build a partnership with other organizations to co sponsor the program?
4. How can the program become part of the organization's long-range strategy for growth and development of employees.

What Participants Want To Know

1. What is the practical application of the program?
2. Is the program supported by management, organized labor, or other influential members of the organization ?
3. What is the expected commitment in terms of time, cost, and follow-up activities?
4. How will the program be incorporated into long-term programs of the organization?
5. How will the program affect the provision of services to employees?

SUMMARY

With all these concerns, it is easy to see that the changing nature of the workplace requires us to

recognize that employee career development is a lifelong process essential to the achievement and maintenance of a high quality, competitive workforce. Employee career development programs provide access to career coaching, assessment, and planning activities that motivate employees to continue their own skill development and assist them in transition within the company or between companies.

As we continue to observe a turbulent workplace in terms of technology and changes in company size, the value of employee career development programs and the counsellors working in partnership with the organizations to deliver them will be in demand for the benefits provided to employees in helping stabilize the workforce in a more positive manner than observed in the past.

RESOURCES

PAVE: The Education and Training Foundation, 1994. Employee Career Development. Alexandria, VA . National Occupational Coordination Committee

National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, 1990. National Career Development Guidelines. Alexandria, VA. Author.

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